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THE INGENIOUS FRANCISCO DE GOYA AND HIS CAYETANA DE ALBA

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Abstract: Remark upon a symbolic device in the portrait of the Duchess of Alba (1795), by Francisco de Goya.
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It has been noted how the deaf Francisco de Goya used the sign alphabet in his portrait of the Duchess of Alba (1795), whose expressive right hand corresponds to the letter g (i.e. an autographic reference to the artist himself)[1].

Francisco de Goya, *The Duchess of Alba/The Whiste Duchess*, 1795, collection of the Duke of Alba, Liria Palace, Madrid (photo: wikimedia.org)

1 Antonio VALIENTE ROMERO, *Francisco de las Barras de Aragón en la Sevila Intersecular*, Editorial Universidad de Sevilla, 2007 ← wikipedia.org/Las Cifras de la Mano de Goya. Regarding the use of letters as monograms in artistic works, see Paulo Martins OLIVEIRA, *The hidden letters in old paintings*, 2015 [online]; *Álvaro Pires, Mestre da Lourinhã*, 2014 [online]; *The (L)eonardo and the (S)alai*, 2012 [online]. As for the penitential symbolism of deafness itself, see *The deaf Bosch and the blind Bruegel*, 2015 [online]; *Bosch, the surdo canis*, 2014 [online].

However, it should also be noted that in the cavity formed by the retracted fingers (≈ ear pinna), there are also lines that form a large C and an Δ/A, which should be interpreted as Cayetana Duchess of Alba.

In other words, the same gesture highlights the authority of the powerful aristocrat, but also the well-known protective sense of the loyal painter towards his esteemed patron (in this case, the hand/g visually equates to a shell). This interpretation is reinforced by the explicit engraving of both names on the Duchess's rings, in a new portrait from 1797.

Francisco de Goya, *The Duchess of Alba/The Black Duchess*, 1797, Hispanic Society of America, New York
(photo: wikimedia,org)

In conclusion, these devices demonstrate Goya's talent for crafting particularly complex and ingenious works[2].

2 On this subject matter see also "Francisco de Goya e os retratos absolutistas de Godoy e Fernando VII", *Octógono*, extra number (5), Sept.12, 2024.